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LATIN AMERICA BRIEF 77-078, 9 MAY 1977.Y

ARGENTINA: THE ARREST ON MAY 4 OF FORMER PRESIDENT ALEJANDRO LANUSSE FOR SUSPECTED FINANCIAL WRONGDOING IN OFFICE HAS STRONG POLITICAL OVERTONES. THREE OTHER TOP OFFICIALS OF THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT THAT GENERAL LANUSSE HEADED IN THE EARLY 1970S ARE ALSO BEING HELD.Y

LANUSSE WILL BE QUESTIONED ABOUT SERIOUS IMPROPRIETIES IN A GOVERNMENT CONTRACT FOR CONSTRUCTION OF AN ALUMINUM PLANT. THE CASE HAS BEEN UNDER INVESTIGATION FOR SEVERAL YEARS, BUT RELATIVELY LITTLE HAS BEEN HEARD ABOUT IT RECENTLY, AND MANY ARGENTINES HAD PROBABLY ASSUMED THE MATTER WOULD BE DROPPED.Y

IN ADDITION, THE CASE HAS BEEN OVERSHADOWED BY RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SPECTACULAR GRAIVER SCANDAL, WHICH PURPORTEDLY LINKS PROMINENT CITIZENS--INCLUDING FORMER GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS--TO THE TERRORIST MONTONEROS.Y

POLITICAL MOTIVES ARE AT LEAST AS IMPORTANT AS OTHER CONSIDERATIONS IN THE MOVT TO BRING LANUSSE TOJUSTICE. HIS ALLEGED MISDEEDS WERE NOT UNUSUAL OR SURPRISING BY [redacted] AND ANY

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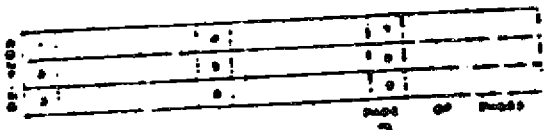

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NUMBER OF OFFICIALS COULD BE CALLED TO ACCOUNT FOR SIMILAR IMPROPRIETIES.¥

FOR SOME TIME, HOWEVER, LANUSSE HAS DRAWN THE IRE OF THE CURRENT MILITARY REGIME, AND HAS PARTICULARLY ANGERED SO-CALLED HARD-LINE OFFICERS. HIS CRITICISMS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S HARSH SECURITY PRACTICES, HIS HIGH PUBLIC PROFILE, AND HIS APPARENT TIES TO PROMINENT NEWS-PAPERMEN HAVE LED SOME ARGENTINES TO CONCLUDE THAT HE IS APPEALING TO IMPORTANT CIVILIAN SECTORS AS A POTENTIAL POLITICAL LEADER. THE REGIME IS NOT PREPARED EVEN TO CONSIDER THE RE-EMERGENCE OF NORMAL POLITICS. DESPITE PRESIDENT VIDELA'S CONCILIATORY WAYS, MILITARY DISTRUST OF LANUSSE IS FURTHER HEIGHTENED BY THE FACT THAT HE PREPARED THE RETURN FROM EXILE OF JUAN PERON.¥

AT LEAST SOME OFFICERS IN THE REGIME ARE CLEARLY BENT ON DISCREDITING LANUSSE. AT THE SAME TIME, THE GOVERNMENT IS PORTRAYING ITS EFFORT AGAINST THE FORMER PRESIDENT AS PROOF THAT IT WILL CLEAN OUT WRONGDOING NO MATTER WHERE IT IS FOUND, EVEN AMONG BROTHER OFFICERS. THE POLITICALLY CYNICAL ARGENTINES ARE NOT LIKELY TO ACCEPT THIS ARGUMENT AT FACE VALUE, AND LANUSSE COULD EVEN EMERGE FROM

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HIS TROUBLES AS A MARTYR.Y

THE CONDUCT OF THE CASE AGAINST LAMUSSE AND THE GRAIVER INVESTIGATION COULD PROVIDE A ROUGH GAUGE OF THE RELATIVE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF HARD-LINERS AND MODERATES. IF THE CAMPAIGN BECOMES MORE AGGRESSIVE AND WIDE-RANGING, IT WILL ALSO BECOME APPARENT THAT HARD-LINERS ARE GAINING THE UPPER HAND. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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